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ABSTRACT

Low staff morale results from professional lives that have little meaning; from frustration and the inability to change what is happening; and from muddled goals and demands exceeding scarce resources. Schools with high staff morale have very distinctive features, including a sense of community. Factors determining high morale are: (1) input into important decisions; (2) recognition and appreciation of teacher and student achievement; (3) a school climate reflecting a feeling of unity, pride, cooperation, acceptance of differences, and security; (4) good communication; (5) opportunities for meaningful professional growth; (6) clear, shared goals; (7) strong, supportive leadership; (8) quality time for collegial interaction; (9) well-maintained physical facilities; (10) good human relations; (11) encouragement and reward for risk taking, innovation, and good teaching; and (12) attention to professional and personal needs. A good start is reviewing local morale factors by using paper surveys, interviews, or group discussions. Principals need to ask themselves some hard questions concerning leadership and communication deficiencies. Taking identified needs seriously and beginning to act on them are morale boosters. Principals are responsible for responding to daily human concerns, for understanding scheduling demands, and for fostering recognition programs, staff meetings, shared leadership, good communication, and professional development. Illustrations from several schools are provided. (MLH)

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A Newsletter for the On-Line Administrator

Vol. XVI, No. 4 (ISSN 0192-6160) May 1990

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Developing Staff Morale

A school functions as an interdependent community whose members work in the best interests of all who gather there to teach and learn. Staff morale refers to the quality of lives within that community. It involves being known and appreciated, having professional knowledge valued, and being given the freedom to act. It involves learning, growing, making mistakes, reflecting on them, and moving on.

Low staff morale results from professional lives that have little meaning; from frustration and the inability to change what is happening; from muddled goals and demands that stretch resources—both human and material—to the breaking point. It comes from no time to ask essential questions such as: Is the goal of schools to raise test scores or to meet lists of goals and objectives? To challenge and nurture students to grow toward a meaningful adulthood?

Schools with high staff morale have very distinctive features. A sense of community is obvious. People care about each other and work together so everyone can succeed and learn things that really matter to them. Adults and students have input into decisions that affect them. They have ownership and pride in their school.

They have chances to be creative, to take risks, to make mistakes, and to become leaders of all kinds. They communicate openly with each other, deal with conflicts, appreciate differences of opinion, and develop individual voices while caring about the good of the whole community. People are honored for what they know. They are not castigated for what they do not know; rather, they are given opportunities to learn.

Developing and maintaining high staff morale is both complex and simple. It is complex in the range of factors that affect it, and simple because all the factors are an outgrowth of a caring, responsive school community. Many of the easier ways to encourage high morale cost little or nothing. Paying daily attention to the "little things," using existing time and programs differently, developing recognition and appreciation programs, laughing together, and working hard at good communication do not cost money. They take commitment to thoughtful human interaction.

Implementing professional development programs, hiring skillful consultants, buying quality time for collegial interaction, addressing professional needs such as salary and benefits, and establishing "wellness" programs can cost money. Low morale costs more, in terms of student achievement, staff commitment, and school climate.

Factors That Determine High Morale

Reflect on your own school. As you read the following factors that determine high morale, think about what works well, what the weak areas are that may be undermining morale. The essential factors are:

1. Input into decision making that directly affects

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curriculum, instruction, and school climate

2. Recognition and appreciation of teacher and student achievement

3. A school climate that reflects a feeling of unity, pride, cooperation, acceptance of differences, and security

4. Good communication

5. Opportunities for meaningful professional growth

6. Clear, shared goals

7. Strong, supportive leadership

8. Quality time for collegial interaction: planning, educational dialog, decision making, problem solving

9. Well-maintained physical environment

10. Good human relations, both within school and between school and community

11. Encouragement and reward for risk taking, innovation, and good teaching

12. Attention to professional needs such as salary, benefits, etc.

13. Attention to personal needs such as stress management, good health, and social interaction.

The Staff Morale Inventory

An inventory of local morale factors is a good starting place. Honest self-examination sets the parameters. Sometimes new issues will come to light; other times self-examination validates what people in the community already knew. Either way, self-examination is an important step.

The review can be a paper survey, interviews, or group discussions. A volunteer committee can create and administer an inventory or use carefully constructed and validated instruments that are already available. The NASSP School Climate Survey, while more comprehensive than a staff morale survey, can provide a wealth of general information. The NASSP Satisfaction Surveys for teachers, students, and parents speak to the issue of personal morale.

An inventory can be as simple as the three-question survey developed by Fillmore (Calif.) Junior High School. Fillmore's questions are: 1) What is a main problem or concern in the school? 2) What do you see as the root of this problem? and, 3) What do you see as solutions? The responses provided all the information Fillmore needed to begin repairing its sagging morale.

The School Profile used at Cabrillo High School in Lompoc, Calif., is a good example of a more comprehensive survey. The profile is a detailed survey of teachers, administrators, and classified personnel about all areas of the school. Compiled and used as a resource for school improvement and staff dialog, it identifies needs and problems, the kind of community people would like to see in the school, and the current status of the school.

Inventory results should be summarized and distributed to everyone.

The Principal's Inventory

Wise principals first ask themselves some challenging questions. Introspection is unquestionably a risk, as some of the discoveries may be upsetting. But it is a necessary risk.

Here is a sample of the kinds of hard questions principals must ask themselves if they are serious about establishing high staff morale:

- How many leaders can I name in this school? Do the same people assume leadership positions? If so, why aren't more people using their leadership abilities? How does my behavior affect the leadership pool?
- Does everyone really know what's going on in this school? If not, why not? Have I sprung any surprise assemblies, schedule changes, or meetings on the staff lately?
- How do I let people know I appreciate their work and recognize their accomplishments? Do I do some of that every day? Do I reach everyone, or only some people? Do staff members show each other appreciation? Do they extend that kind of recognition to students? Do I?
- Is gossip a big part of communication here?
- Are people free to say how they feel, to bring up problems, or to give constructive criticism? How did I react to the last disagreement I had with a staff member?
- Who decides the content for inservice days or whatever constitutes professional development—those

being "professionally developed," or someone else?
- Is this school broken up into factions? If so, why? Are the causes dealt with or ignored?
- Who do I ask for input or feedback—those I suspect will agree with me or those who represent a diversity of views? Do I actually listen to input or feedback I don't like?
- What kind of time do staff members have to work together?
- What does the school really look like? Is it clean? Attractive? Well-lighted? What activities are in progress to make it a more comfortable place? How long did it take to get the last leak repaired?
- Have I visited each teacher's classroom in the last few months for something other than evaluations?
- How did the school goals originate? Do people "own" these goals, or are they just words? Can I name one "real" goal and what we are all doing to reach it?
- How much time do I spend informing others (school committee, public, teachers, administrators in other buildings) about what is going on in my building?

Addressing Identified Morale Issues

After all the inventories are administered and questions are posed, how a school develops a program will depend on the working style of the school and on what needs attention. There is no ready-made formula.

In some schools, the formation of a staff morale committee is a logical next step. Willow Creek Junior High in Rochester, Minn., did just that, forming a Social and School Climate Committee to address morale issues arising from a new middle school pilot program.

Other schools hire consultants to conduct workshops during inservice days. Sometimes heightened awareness and purposeful staff/administration response increase positive interactions on a daily basis, thus raising morale.

Thayer High School in Winchester, N. H., takes this approach. Everyone, particularly the principal, pays attention to the rhythm of the school and to times of stress, and works to increase quality time together.

The response may mean commitment to some significant change extending over several years, such as St. Petersburg (Fla.) High School's four year commitment to an NEA school restructuring effort, the Mastery in Learning Project.

One can generally find structured programs and skilled consultants to address such areas as peer coaching, support teams, learning style, personality assessment, teacher efficacy, problem-solving approaches, and shared decision making. Professional development can play a major role in actualizing such programs.

The American version of the Japanese "Quality Circles," used extensively in business and industry, can make a real difference in people's commitment to their work and to those they work with. Quality Circles are voluntary groups of teachers and administrators who meet regularly with a trained facilitator to talk informally about personal or professional concerns or interests.

Generally, taking identified needs seriously and beginning to act on them is a morale booster. No one likes surveys that are not followed up. Asking for honest input and then ignoring it is worse than not asking at all.

Taking Care of the Little Things

Finding time is an ongoing problem in schools. It may take a long time to address particularly difficult morale issues, even longer than a school with low morale can endure. When this is the case, taking care of the little things can make a significant difference. For the principal, responding to daily human concerns can mean:

- Saying hello to people and using their names
- Sending a note or a word of congratulations for a job well done, an achievement, an excellent idea, a birthday
- Asking others for their opinions, and then listening
- Scheduling time for regular visits to classrooms
- Letting people know what is going on
- Following through on teacher requests
- Asking for help when you need it
- Dropping by the teachers' room for lunch.

The school year has a rhythm. Everyone knows the high stress times. Responding to those times differently is one of the little things a principal can do. A change of pace or some enjoyable activity is a humane response to stressful times. The little things are the oil that lubricates a community and establish-

es a base for genuine caring and interdependence.

Recognition and Appreciation Programs

Teachers talk most about recognition when discussing high staff morale. Recognition may not be the most important element of morale, but it is often the first thing mentioned.

Student and teacher recognition must be part of every school program. The more accomplishments that are recognized, the higher morale will be. Several examples in the "To Illustrate" section show clearly how personal and varied recognition and appreciation can be.

Staff Meetings

Staff meetings provide a readily accessible forum for the development and maintenance of high staff morale and community building. The structure of staff meetings is important.

At Wells (Maine) Junior High School, staff meetings are run by a volunteer "facilitation team" composed of teachers, administrators, and support staff. The facilitation team plans the process for each meeting, often using cooperative learning techniques.

Meeting agendas may include "burning issues," new programs, problem solving, sharing of workshop experiences, or social events. At one time or another all the major morale factors are reflected in these meetings.

Shared Leadership

Fostering shared leadership takes a courageous principal who clearly sees the benefits of encouraging everyone to use their leadership potential for the good of the school. The notion that power is finite and must be taken away from one person to be given to someone else is a fallacy. The more every individual in a community uses his or her personal power productively, the more the pool of power, energy, and leadership increases.

This does not mean offering teachers trivial and meaningless leadership opportunities. It *does* mean encouraging staff members to take leadership positions where their interests lie. This can be anything from arranging for more healthful foods in the vending machines to researching an experiential math program. The sense of belonging and commitment that comes through meaningful leadership is vital to high morale.

Shared leadership can take the form of democratic governance. Schools like Hanover High School in New Hampshire and Brookline High School in Massachusetts use a town meeting process that gives teachers, students, and administrators a forum for working together to solve common problems.

So many things in a school need committed leadership. No single person can possibly provide the necessary leadership. Things simply go undone, and that is not useful. The benefits of shared leadership go far beyond the raising of morale.

Good Communication

Good communication is essential. Calendars, newsletters, and bulletin boards are basic. The frequent complaint that no one reads them can be averted by putting shared leadership into action. Find someone who writes entertainingly and provocatively. Find an artist who can produce imaginative layouts. Together, they can produce newsletters that staff members will look forward to. Include more than announcements; try some humor, personal anecdotes, sharing of ideas, featured staff or departments, creative writing by staff, want ads, etc.

Intercom announcements right after school presented by an aspiring comic or disc jockey can be effective. Search until you find something that gets people's attention. Not knowing what is going on can wreak havoc on staff morale.

An area of communication that needs ongoing attention is the discussion of what people's work entails. Teachers must know what a principal does and how they can give input and share responsibility. Principals must know how teachers see their work and where they can provide support. Teachers must reflect on their own roles with colleagues. This kind of professional communication increases the collegiality so necessary for high morale and a cohesive school.

Professional Development

Professional development must be directly connected to staff needs and interests. A potpourri of "one shot" inservice programs designed without regard to teacher-identified needs, or programs formulated at the central office, rarely contribute to high morale.

The professional development programs at Wells (Maine) Junior High School and at Consolidated High School District 230 in Palos Hills, Ill., illustrate two very different, but equally responsive approaches.

The Wells Junior High School professional development program evolved over three years to serve the institutional needs of a school involved in significant restructuring, as well as the needs of individual

staff members. Inservice days and staff meetings are devoted to issues of restructuring—primarily shared decision making and its use to identify and act on problems and goals.

Innovative programs have been developed, organizational structures redesigned, and teacher leadership expanded. Inservice days are planned no more than a month ahead so content may be responsive to the ongoing restructuring process.

Staff members attend workshops, conferences, or classes that relate to their own personal and professional growth. They are given released time and financial support. Requests are reviewed by the school-based professional development committee of teachers and administrators, which follows standards consistent with the district committee. Through this flexible and responsive professional development program, 11 of the 13 primary factors for high staff morale are consistently addressed.

In the Consolidated High School District of Palos Hills, Ill., a highly structured professional development program was enacted under a board of education-approved five-year Human Resource Development initiative. An Inservice for Excellence Committee, with teacher and administrative representation, coordinates the program. The goals of the program are:

- To put teachers in control of their own professional development
- To encourage collegial sharing about the art and science of teaching
- To raise intuitive teaching behaviors to the conscious level
- To increase teachers' repertoire of teaching strategies
- To create a climate with instructional excellence as the norm
- To improve student achievement.

The program has three components: summer training, peer coaching, and follow-up training. During the past three years the summer training included effective teaching techniques, learning styles/teaching styles, student motivation, peer coaching, cooperative learning, a whole-language approach, understanding today's adolescent, and creating positive relationships among students and adults.

The staff members trained in the summer formed teams to coach colleagues in areas determined by the teams. The follow-up workshops further the skills of the peer coaching teams. These activities are held during preparation periods, before and after school, and in the evenings. Outside consultants facilitate the workshops.

This program focuses on respect for the professionalism of teachers, on decision making rather than behaviors, on development of strong collegial affiliations, and on targeting the professional culture of the school as the focus for change.

More than 400 teachers and administrators have participated in the summer training and become peer coaches. In three years, the program has addressed 10 of the 13 morale factors and developed an enviable professional culture that benefits the learning of the students and the working life of the adults.

TO ILLUSTRATE

The following schools illustrate that both formal programs and the informal ways people act toward one another make a difference in the school community.

Springfield High School — **303 South St.**
Wayne R. Ogden, Principal — **Springfield, Vt. 05156**

The Springfield Schools are experiencing a new atmosphere of collegiality that has raised spirits throughout the district. Several programs are of particular note:

1. An inservice planning committee, made up of teachers and administrators, has created an innovative professional development program enabling teachers to earn recertification and graduate credit from inservice education. A needs assessment, by means of surveys, established areas of focus. The committee then designed eight mini-courses to be taught during six early release days during the year.

Teachers enroll in a course of their choice. All participants are granted recertification credits; graduate credits are awarded to teachers who contract an additional project outside school hours. In addition to the credit offering, this program gives teachers a choice about the content of their inservice program and an opportunity for in-depth study and follow-up.

2. The administration believes that "empowerment" of the teaching staff creates an atmosphere for teachers to develop a sense of vested interest in the system. During the past contract negotiations, for example, the administration suggested that subcommittees be

formed to make recommendations to both negotiating teams. The committees were made up of teachers, administrators and school board members. Areas of interest included professional development, salaries, medical insurance, and working conditions.

These committees proved to be very productive. Not only did they satisfy the goals of their targeted areas, they also set a tone of shared responsibility and respect for others' opinions and needs.

3. Two teacher-administrator teams received summer training to develop a "wellness program" that will support educators in maintaining positive mental and physical attitudes. The opening day of school featured a humor consultant as a guest speaker and a health fair with experts, displays, a healthful lunch, and an afternoon of physical activities.

4. A belief in the connection between peer support and high morale is reflected in the mentorship program at the high school. Through this program, all teachers new to the high school, whether they are entry level or experienced, are paired with a mentor teacher. This mentor/protege' approach provides new teachers with a non-evaluative confidant who offers support in all areas.

Maryvale High School — **3415 N. 59th St.**
George Mannon, Principal — **Phoenix, Ariz. 85033**

Four key elements promote high morale at Maryvale High School:

- Good communication and open dialog are part of the daily life at Maryvale. The administration makes it a priority to keep teachers informed about what is going on in all aspects of the school. Disagreement is accepted and valued. An open door policy encourages teachers to talk with administrators and with one another.
- Shared goals are posted, and information pertaining to these goals gets visible attention. For example, lowering the dropout rate and increasing daily attendance is a shared goal. Attendance and dropout figures are posted weekly. As they improve, faculty meetings become celebrations. Signs saying "94%" are placed around the school and everyone knows that they refer to the goal of 94 percent attendance. Through good communication and a shared challenge, dropout rates are coming down and attendance is going up.

A Shepherding Project was developed to increase graduation rates. When students are identified as being at risk, they are assigned to a member of a team for one-on-one "shepherding." Programs like this contribute to teacher effectiveness, which, in turn, keeps morale high.

- Recognition and celebration of success go hand in hand. A Brag Board recognizes students and staff members for achievements in or out of school. Each month a teacher, a student, and a classified person become honored people of the month and are rewarded with special parking places. Retirees are invited to join the present faculty in celebration at a traditional holiday party. An end-of-the-year breakfast features a teacher skit satirizing the year.
- School-based management gives teachers a voice in areas that directly concern their working lives. An ongoing Campus Committee with representatives of the teachers, administration, and classified personnel discuss various school concerns. A School Improvement Team looks at the school as a whole and plans improvements on a continuing basis. More than 50 percent of the staff members have served on committees representative of school-based management.

Adlai E. Stevenson High School — **16070 West Highway 22**
Richard DuFour, Principal — **Prairie View, Ill.**

Recognition is the key to high staff morale at Stevenson High School. Several programs are specifically intended to make heroes and heroines of teachers.

- The Kudo's Memorandum is a 5 to 10-page portfolio of community appreciation for individual teachers. The commendations, solicited by the administration from parents and graduates, are personal testimonials of appreciation and recognition for the inspirational or supportive influences teachers have had on their students.
- The Super Pat (Patriot) Award is a plaque awarded to teachers for efforts above and beyond the call of duty. No limits are set on the number of awards that can be given. Administrators and department chairs recommend teachers for the awards, which are presented at a faculty meeting. In three years, more than 100 awards have been given.
- The Rose Awards are a unique celebration. Several dozen roses are brought to a designated faculty meeting and any faculty member can present a rose and a testimonial of thanks, admiration, recognition to any other faculty member. It is a time for teachers to

thank and recognize their colleagues.

• A Trophy Case for teachers stands beside the athletic trophy case and features teacher awards and achievements for outstanding performance of any kind. Many of these awards come from an aggressive program to nominate Stevenson High School teachers for state and national awards and recognition. In the past six years, 20 teachers have received state or national awards.

Celebration and social interaction are valued as well. Festivities include a faculty dinner dance hosted by the administration and school committee at the beginning of each year and a brunch at the end of the year to present awards to faculty members for milestones reached, such as 25 years of teaching, 100 percent attendance, etc. During the year, the administration and faculty each give a party in honor of the other group.

The faculty is also involved in decision making. Teacher/administrator task forces are formed to work on critical areas, from creation of a districtwide vision to identifying interruptions in the school day. Upon completion of a study, the conclusions are brought to the full faculty for endorsement or revision.

Attention is also given to good health—both physical and emotional. A faculty assistance program offers anonymous counseling. Blood pressure clinics, check-ups, stress reduction seminars, and other health-related programs are available to teachers on a regular basis.

Northeast High School — 3701 Trenton Rd.
Joseph Edward Williams, Principal — Clarksville, Tenn. 37040

Northeast High School is a new school with a carefully selected faculty committed to making the school environment positive for students. Teachers and students participate in many activities together, resulting in high morale and an unusually high level of trust between them. Some of the activities that support high level of student/teacher integration are:

• Teachers, support staff, and students participate in special days and events such as Blue and Gold Day, Spirit Day, Casual Day, Beach Day, etc.

• During Spirit Week (homecoming) teachers and students perform skits during the pep rallies, and participate in a faculty-student talent show, a faculty-student women's softball game, and a senior boys-faculty basketball game.

• Open communication is a high priority at Northeast. Everyone feels a part of the school because everyone knows what is going on. A monthly calendar that outlines all student and staff events is distributed to everyone.

• Communication problems are worked out by joint committees of teachers and students. For example, the use of the intercom for announcements was not effective. A committee worked out a new plan so daily announcements are published and distributed during second period and posted on the school bulletin board where latecomers can check them.

A sense of belonging is a major factor in high morale for everyone at Northeast High School.

Cabrillo High School — P.O. Box H
Debra Bradley, Principal — Lompoc, Calif. 93438

Cabrillo High School has a range of activities and practices geared to raising or sustaining teacher morale.

Recognition and awards

• The Golden Lion Award is given by the staff to a colleague for outstanding work with students and/or school programs.

• A section in the annual "report card" to the community is devoted to the accomplishments of teachers.

• Departments are highlighted at faculty meetings. Members of the featured department talk about what they are doing.

• *The Green Paper*, a newsletter, reports on what teachers are doing beyond the classroom, such as professional growth activities, community involvement, and participation in student activities.

Social activities and laughter

• On The Day of the Teacher, administrators make breakfast for the teachers.

• Each month a department stages a "food event" for everyone. The foreign language department held a Mexican Fiesta potluck lunch; the math department put on an early bird breakfast; the art department served pumpkin pie in November.

Democratic Practices

• Community action is a cultural norm. Community members have input into decision making and the sharing of ideas and problems.

• Staff members evaluate the administration annually. These evaluations are taken seriously and acted upon.

• Teachers are part of the hiring team for new faculty members and select their own department heads.

Teachers' expertise is valued and used. For example, the math department was engaged in a three-year program, Project TIME, to improve instruction. These teachers now serve as resources in cooperative learning and new instructional strategies. They provide a model for other departments to initiate changes in instruction and curriculum.

Thayer High School **Winchester, N.H. 03470**
Dennis Littky, Principal

At Thayer High School, a small rural school with a staff of 27, high morale is a matter of attention to community under the active leadership of a principal who sees his job as that of a coach. The principal tries to respond to the rhythm of the school with attention to small things on a regular basis. This results in a close-knit, caring, energetic group of adults who pass that spirit on to their students.

• The principal meets with two teachers every day. In addition, all teachers have journals and carry on journal conversations with the principal. These conversations can be about anything and provide both teachers and the principal with a professional intimacy rarely experienced in schools.

• The first 15 minutes of the weekly staff meeting is set aside for announcements and "broad picture" information. The remaining 45 minutes are work time for improving curriculum and instruction. Food is provided by the teachers on a rotating basis.

• Everyone works on teams for support, planning, and scheduling.

• The faculty begins each year with a retreat away from the school. Funding for this activity is always a priority because the results are worth the effort. The definition of goals and the community spirit engendered by such a retreat set the tone for the year.

Communication at Thayer is close and ongoing. In addition to the weekly staff meetings, a memo is issued every Friday that includes praise, business, and the results of meetings. A Question Time session is held periodically when critical questions can be explored, sometimes verbally, sometimes in written form. Anyone can raise questions, and the discussion, both formal and informal, resonates throughout the school.

This *Practitioner* was developed by Marylyn Wentworth, Kennebunkport, Maine, an educational consultant in the areas of school restructuring, cooperative learning, and mathematics teaching.

She is an adjunct faculty member in the school of education at the University of Southern Maine, and a researcher in the NEA Mastery in Learning Project.

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